DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 445 CG 022 717

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TITLE Gender, Self-Monitoring, Alcohol Consumption, and Sexual Behavior: A Survey.
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (98th, Boston, MA, August 10-14, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome; *Contraception; *Drinking; Higher Education; *Sex Differences; *Sexuality; Student Attitudes; *Student Behavior; Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS *Self Monitoring

ABSTRACT

For this study, college students were asked to describe their sexual histories and how their sexual behavior related to alcohol consumption, contraceptive use, and concern over Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) so that more could be learned about gender and self-monitoring differences in sexual behavior. College undergraduates (N=94) completed a series of sexual behavior questions and the Self-Monitoring Scale. The results revealed no differences in terms of the proportion of male and female respondents who reported engaging in sexual intercourse over the past year. Similarly, high and low self-monitors were equally likely to report engaging in sexual intercourse over the preceding year. A greater proportion of low self-monitors, compared to high self-monitors, reported having sexual relations with only one partner. Other findings suggest that a greater proportion of males, as compared to females, used a condom while a greater proportion of females reported always or almost always using some form of effective birth control. A greater proportion of males than females reported drinking at least some of the time while on a date. A greater proportion of females and a greater proportion of high self-monitors reported being concerned about AIDS. (NB)

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ED322445

Gender, Self-Monitoring, Alcohol Consumption, and Sexual Behavior: A Survey

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Presented at the 98th Annual Meeting

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at Boston, MA, August 10-14, 1990

Running head: SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

CG 022717

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Abstract

Past research has demonstrated that men attribute more sexual meaning to heterosexual interactions than do women. For example, Abbey (1982) found that men perceive both male and female targets as being more seductive and promiscuous than did women. In addition previous research suggests that high self-monitors, as compared to low self-monitors, possess different sexual attitudes which could manifest themselves in differences in their sexual behaviors (see Snyder, Simpson & Gangestad, 1986; Harnish, Abbey & DeBono, in press). One shortcoming of this research has been that it has typically focused on perceptions of sexual intent by either (a) creating artificial laboratory situations or (b) asking participants to consider hypothetical scenarios, photographs or slides. In the present research, we asked respondents to describe their sexual histories and how their sexual behavior related to alcohol consumption, contraceptive use, and concern over AIDS so that more could be learned about gender and self-monitoring differences in sexual behavior.

Gender, Self-Monitoring, Alcohol Consumption, and Sexual Behavior: A Survey

Past research has demonstrated that men attribute more sexual meaning to heterosexual interactions than do women. For example, Abbey (1982) found that men perceive both male and female targets as being more seductive and promiscuous than did women. In addition, previous research examining the personality construct of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987) suggests that high self-monitors, in contrast to low self-monitors, have a more extensive knowledge base about other people and the type of behavior that is typically manifest in a given situation (Snyder & Cantor, 1980) which in turn could be reflected in the sexual attitudes and behavior of high and low self-monitors (For an elaboration of this argument, see Snyder, Simpson, & Gangestad, 1986; Harnish, Abbey & DeBono, in press). However, one shortcoming of this research is that it has typically focused on perceptions of sexual intent by either (a) creating artificial laboratory situations or (b) asking participants to consider hypothetical scenarios, photographs or slides. In the present research, we asked respondents to describe their sexual histories and how their sexual behavior related to alcohol consumption, contraceptive use and concern over AIDS so that more could be learned about gender and self-monitoring differences in sexual behavior.

Method

Respondents were 94 Michigan State University undergraduates (29 males, 65 females). Each received extra credit toward their introductory psychology course grade in exchange for their participation.

Procedure. Respondents participated in groups of approximately 8 persons. Each respondent was given a questionnaire packet and was shown to a separate cubicle to complete the questionnaire.

Measures. All questionnaire packets contained (in counterbalanced orders) a series of sexual behavior questions (e.g., "Have you had sexual intercourse within the past year? If yes, how often during the past year have you had sexual intercourse? How many different partners?") and the Self-monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986).

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, the sample consisted of a total of 94 unmarried Michigan State University undergraduates (29 males and 65 females). We classified 53 participants who scored 10 or greater on the Self-monitoring Scale as high self-monitors (HSM) and 40 participants who scored 9 or less as low self-monitors (LSM). Their class standing ranged from freshman (32%) to senior (9%). The first set of questions posed to the respondents concerned their sexual behavior within the past year. These findings are discussed in terms of percentage distributions presented in Table 2 that provide data regarding if the respondent had sexual intercourse within the past year, how often the respondent engaged in sexual intercourse within the past year and the number of different partners the respondent had sexual intercourse within the past year.

As can be seen from Table 2, 70% (72% males, 69% females) of the respondents had sexual relations over the past year whereas 30% (28% males, 31% females) reported not engaging in sexual relations. Seventy percent of HSM and 70% of LSM reported engaging in sexual intercourse whereas 30% of HSM and 30% of LSM reported not having sexual intercourse during the past year. Also reported in Table 2 are the findings for the number of heterosexual partners the respondents had intercourse with over the past year. A bimodal distribution emerged for both male and female respondents, and for both high and low self-monitors. This distribution perhaps characterizes the nature of the respondents' dating activities over the preceding year. Those who indicated a higher frequency of having sexual relations may have been engaged in a long term relationship, whereas

those who reported a lower frequency of having sexual relations may have been searching for, or cultivating a relationship. Finally, Table 2 presents the findings for the number of different partners that the respondents had sexual intercourse with during the past year. Responses ranged from having sex with only one partner (41% for males, 48% for females; 54% for HSM, 71% for LSM) to 11 partners (1% for females; 3% for HSM).

The second set of questions posed to the respondents concerned their contraception use within the past year. These findings are discussed in terms of percentage distributions presented in Table 3 that provide data regarding if the respondent used a condom when engaging in sexual intercourse, and what proportion of the time did the respondent have intercourse in which no effective form of contraception was used.

As can be seen from Table 3, of those who had intercourse within the past year, 57% of the male respondents and 43% of the female respondents reported using or having their partners use a condom at least some of the time when having intercourse, whereas 38% of the male respondents and 57% of the female respondents indicated that they or their partners never used a condom. Forty-four percent of HSM and 54% of LSM reported using or having their partners use a condom at least some of the time, whereas 56% of HSM and 42% of LSM reported never using or never having their partners use a condom. Finally, Table 3 presents the findings for the proportion of the time the respondents had sexual intercourse in which no effective form of contraception was used. Responses ranged from always or almost always having sex without an effective means of birth control (5% for males, 4% for females; 5% for HSM, 4% for LSM) to always or almost always using an effective means of birth control (42% for males, 62% for females; 61% for HSM, 50% for LSM).

The third set of questions posed to the respondents concerned their consumption of alcohol while on a date. These findings are discussed in terms of percentage distributions presented in Table 4

that provide data regarding how often the respondent drank alcohol while on a date, and how often the respondent became intoxicated while on a date.

As can be seen from Table 4, 72% of the male respondents and 50% of the female respondents reported at least some of the time drinking when on a date, whereas 28% of the male respondents and 48% of the female respondents indicated that they almost never or never drank while on a date. Sixty-five percent of HSM and 45% of LSM reported drinking some of the time while on a date, whereas 35% of HSM and 50% of LSM reported almost never or never drinking while on a date. Finally, Table 4 presents the findings for the proportion of the time the respondents were intoxicated when on a date. Responses ranged from always or almost always drunk (5% for males, 0% for females; 2% for HSM, 0% for LSM) to never or almost never drunk while a on date (44% for males, 59% for females; 43% for HSM, 67% for LSM).

The fourth set of questions posed to the respondents concerned their use of alcohol and sexual behavior. These findings are discussed in terms of percentage distributions presented in Table 5 that provide data regarding how often the respondent drank alcohol when having intercourse, and how often the respondent had intercourse without an effective means of birth control when they had drank alcohol.

As can be seen from Table 5, of those who had intercourse within the past years, 86% of the male respondents and 67% of the female respondents reported sometimes drinking when they had intercourse, whereas 10% of the male respondents and 33% of the female respondents indicated that they almost never drank when they had intercourse. Seventy-six percent of HSM and 68% of LSM reported drinking when having intercourse, whereas 24% of HSM and 28% of LSM reported almost never drinking when having intercourse. Finally, Table 5 presents the findings for the proportion of the time the respondents had intercourse and did not use birth control and were intoxicated.

Responses ranged from always had intercourse without using a contraceptive while drinking alcohol (8% for males, 24% for females; 21% for HSM, 14% for LSM) to never having intercourse without using a contraceptive while drinking alcohol (34% for males, 6% for females; 0% for HSM, 30% for LSM).

The final set of questions posed to the respondents was their concern over AIDS. These findings are discussed in terms of percentage distributions presented in Table 6 that provide data regarding how often the respondent asked his or her partner about his or her past sexual history before engaging in sex, and asking his or her partner about his or her possible exposure to AIDS.

As can be seen from Table 6, 24% of the male respondents and 44% of the female respondents reported always asking their partner about his or her sexual history before having sex with him or her, whereas 38% of the male respondents and 16% of the female respondents indicated that they never asked their partner about their sexual history before having sex. Thirty-five percent of HSM and 39% of LSM reported asking for this information, whereas 32% of HSM and 11% of LSM reported never asking for this information. Finally, Table 6 presents the findings for the proportion of the time the respondents asked their partner about their possible exposure to AIDS. Responses ranged from always asking their partner about possible exposure to AIDS (19% for males, 29% for females; 24% for HSM, 25% for LSM) to never asking their partner about their possible exposure to AIDS (52% for males, 36% for females; 51% for HSM, 29% for LSM).

Discussion

These findings provide a rich description of college student's sexual activities over the past year. There was not a differences in terms of the proportion of male and female respondents who reported engaging in sexual intercourse over the past year. Similarly, high and low self-monitors were equally likely to report engaging in sexual intercourse over the preceding year. Interestingly, a greater

proportion of low self-monitoring respondents, compared to high self-monitoring respondents, reported having sexual relations with only one partner. This finding is consistent with previous research (Snyder et al., 1986). The contraceptive use findings suggest that a greater proportion of males, as compared to females, used a condom at least some of the time when having intercourse but a greater proportion of females reported always or almost always using some form of effective birth control. The implications of these findings suggest that females may be at a greater risk for contracting the AIDS virus than males because the use of a condom is not a preferred method of birth control among females. The results surrounding the alcohol consumption questions revealed several interesting findings. First, a greater proportion of males rather than females reported at least some of the time drinking while on a date. This finding may have implication for how friendliness cues are interpreted while on the date. Further research is need to examine the relation between the amount of alcohol consumed and how friendliness cues are perceived. A greater proportion of females, as compared to males, reported that when they did have intercourse and did not use an effective means of birth control, they were drinking alcohol. Finally, a greater proportion of females, as compared to males, and a greater proportion of high self-monitors, as compare to low self-monitors, were more concerned over AIDS. A greater proportion of female and high self-monitoring respondents reported asking their partners about their past sexual history and asking their partners about their possible exposure to AIDS.

This research has provided preliminary information concerning gender and self-monitoring differences in naturally occurring sexual behavior. Further research regarding these areas might provided information, especially to people who are dating, on what steps they need to take to reduce the likelihood that their friendliness cues may be misperceive, and what steps they need to take to reduce the likelihood of contracting AIDS.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Sample.

Sex of Respondent		Number	Percent
Male		29	31%
Female		65	69%
	Totals	94	100%
Self-monitoring Propensity of Respondent			
High self-monitor		53	56%
Low self-monitor		40	43%
Not ascertained		1	1%
	Totals	94	100%
Class standing			
Freshman		30	32%
Sophomore		37	39%
Junior		18	19%
Senior		9	10%
	Totals	94	100%

Table 2

Sexual Behavior Percentage Distribution.

Variable	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
Had sexual intercourse over the past year	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	21	72%	45	69%	37	70%	28	70%
No	8	28%	20	31%	16	30%	12	30%
Not ascertained	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Totals	29	100%	65	100%	53	100%	40	100%

	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
How often did you have sexual intercourse over the past year	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Fewer than 5 times	5	24%	8	18%	7	19%	6	21%
6-11 times	6	29%	2	4%	6	16%	2	7%
about once a month	0	0%	3	7%	1	3%	2	7%
2-3 times a month	3	14%	14	31%	11	30%	6	21%
About once a week	5	24%	10	22%	4	11%	10	37%
2-3 times a week	0	0%	8	18%	6	16%	2	7%
4 or more times a week	2	9%	0	0%	2	5%	0	0%
Totals	21	100%	45	100%	37	100%	28	100%

Table 2 (continued)

Sexual Behavior Percentage Distribution.

Variable	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
How many different people have you had sexual intercourse with over the past year	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 person	12	41%	31	48%	20	54%	20	71%
2 persons	2	7%	8	12%	6	16%	4	14%
3 persons	5	17%	4	6%	6	16%	3	11%
4 persons	1	3%	1	2%	1	3%	1	4%
5 persons	2	7%	1	2%	2	5%	0	0%
6 persons	0	0%	1	2%	1	3%	0	0%
11 persons	0	0%	1	1%	1	3%	0	0%
Not Ascertained	7	21%	20	29%	0	0%	0	0%
Totals	29	100%	65	100%	37	100%	28	100%

Table 3

Contraceptive Use Percentage Distribution.

Variable	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
What proportion of the time did you or your partner use a condom when engaging in sexual intercourse	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always (100% of the time)	3	15%	9	20%	5	14%	7	25%
Almost always	4	19%	6	13%	5	14%	5	17%
Usually (75% of the time)	2	9%	1	2%	2	5%	1	4%
About half of the time	1	5%	2	4%	1	3%	1	4%
Sometime (25% of the time)	2	9%	2	4%	3	8%	1	4%
Almost never	8	38%	26	57%	21	56%	12	42%
Not ascertained	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%
Totals	21	100%	45	100%	37	100%	28	100%

Table 3 (cont.)

What proportion of the time did you have intercourse in which no effective form of contraception was used

	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Almost always or always	1	5%	2	4%	2	5%	1	4%
Usually	1	5%	3	7%	1	3%	2	7%
About half the time	1	5%	1	2%	1	3%	1	4%
Sometimes	2	10%	3	7%	5	14%	0	0%
Almost never	6	28%	8	18%	5	14%	9	31%
Never	9	42%	28	62%	23	61%	14	50%
Not ascertained	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%
Totals	21	100%	45	100%	37	100%	28	100%

Table 4

Alcohol Use and Dating Behavior Percentage Distribution.

Variable	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
How often did you drink (any type of alcoholic beverage) while you were on a date	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always or almost always	3	10%	2	3%	4	8%	1	3%
Usually	5	17%	7	11%	9	17%	3	8%
About half the time	9	31%	9	14%	11	21%	7	17%
Sometimes	4	14%	14	22%	10	19%	7	17%
Almost never	4	14%	16	25%	8	14%	12	30%
Never	4	14%	15	23%	11	21%	8	20%
Not ascertained	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	2	5%
Totals	29	100%	65	100%	53	100%	40	100%

Thinking back over the times that you did drink when on a date, how often did you get drunk while on the date	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Almost always or always	1	4%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%
Usually	1	4%	2	4%	2	5%	1	3%
About half of the time	4	16%	3	6%	5	12%	2	7%
Sometimes	8	32%	15	31%	16	38%	7	23%
Almost never	6	24%	22	46%	14	33%	13	44%
Never	5	20%	6	13%	4	10%	7	23%
Totals	25	100%	48	100%	42	100%	30	100%

Table 5

Alcohol Use and Sexual Behavior Percentage Distribution.

Variable	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
What proportion of the time were you drinking when you had sexual intercourse	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always (100% of the time)	4	19%	1	2%	4	11%	1	4%
Almost always	5	24%	3	7%	5	14%	2	7%
Usually (75% of the time)	0	0%	1	2%	1	2%	0	0%
About half of the time	3	14%	9	20%	8	22%	4	14%
Sometime (25% of the time)	6	29%	16	36%	10	27%	12	43%
Almost never	2	10%	15	33%	9	24%	8	28%
Not Ascertained	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%
Totals	21	100%	45	100%	37	100%	28	100%

	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
What proportion of the times when you had intercourse without birth control were you drinking alcohol	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always (100% of the time)	1	8%	4	24%	3	21%	2	14%
75%	5	42%	6	34%	1	7%	1	7%
50%	1	8%	1	6%	1	7%	1	7%
25%	1	8%	1	6%	8	56%	3	21%
Never (0% of the time)	4	34%	1	6%	0	0%	4	30%
Not ascertained	0	0%	4	24%	1	7%	3	21%
Totals	12	100%	17	100%	14	100%	14	100%

Table 6

Concern Over Aids and Own Sexual Behavior Percentage Distribution.

Variable	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
Before having intercourse with a person for the first time, what percentage of the time did you ask this person about his or her past sexual history	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always (100% of the time)	5	24%	20	44%	13	35%	11	39%
75%	3	14%	10	22%	5	14%	8	29%
50%	2	10%	4	9%	4	11%	2	7%
25%	3	14%	3	7%	3	8%	3	11%
Never (0% of the time)	8	38%	7	16%	12	32%	3	11%
Not ascertained	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	1	3%
Totals	21	100%	45	100%	37	100%	28	100%

Table 6 (cont.)

Before having intercourse with a person for the first time, what percentage of the time did you ask this person about his or her possible exposure to AIDS

	Respondent							
	Males		Females		HSM		LSM	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always (100% of the time)	4	19%	13	29%	9	24%	7	25%
75%	2	10%	5	11%	3	8%	4	14%
50%	1	5%	6	13%	3	8%	4	14%
25%	3	14%	2	4%	2	6%	3	11%
Never (0% of the time)	11	52%	16	36%	19	51%	8	29%
Not ascertained	0	0%	3	7%	1	3%	2	7%
Totals	21	100%	45	100%	37	100%	28	100%